



September 07, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
House Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate

Re: Closing the Medicaid Coverage Gap

Dear Congressional Leaders:

We are writing on behalf of the HIV Health Care Access Working Group (HHCAGW), a coalition of national and community-based organizations representing health centers, medical providers, public health professionals, advocates, and people living with HIV.

We write to urge Congress to close the Medicaid “coverage gap” that persists in the 12 states that have not adopted the Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). According to national estimates, over two million low-income individuals living in these states are both denied access to Medicaid and ineligible for subsidies to purchase private insurance on the ACA Marketplace.¹ This leaves them without access to the care and treatment that would help them remain healthy and stave off disease progression and disability.

HIV demonstrates the cruelty of the coverage gap and the widening disparities it has wrought across Medicaid and non-Medicaid expansion states. With access to regular antiretroviral treatment and care, HIV is not only a manageable health condition, but HIV levels in the bloodstream can be reduced to such low levels that sexual transmission of HIV is prevented (undetectable equals untransmittable, or U=U). This is why increasing access to HIV care and

¹ Rachel Garfield, Kendal Orgera, and Anthony Damico, Kaiser Family Foundation, The Coverage Gap: Uninsured Poor Adults in States that Do Not Expand Medicaid (2021), available at <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/the-coverage-gap-uninsured-poor-adults-in-states-that-do-not-expand-medicaid/>.

treatment is a public health priority and at the center of the federal government’s ambitious plan to end the HIV epidemic by 2030.²

Closing the Medicaid coverage gap is a necessary, life-saving policy solution for low-income individuals who were intended by Congress to have been covered under the Medicaid expansion. It would ensure health insurance coverage to the 20% of all people living with HIV who are uninsured in non-expansion states.³ Medicaid coverage is proven to increase access to HIV prevention, thereby reducing transmissions and furthering public health goals.⁴

Closing the Medicaid coverage gap presents an enormous opportunity to address racial disparities in health care that are exacerbated in non-expansion states. Absent Medicaid expansion, southern states (where 95 percent of uninsured individuals now live) have become the epicenter of the HIV epidemic: in 2019, more than half of all new HIV diagnoses were in the south.⁵ People of color, who disproportionately live in the south, are bearing the greatest burden of the HIV epidemic: in 2019, 75% of people diagnosed with HIV were people of color.⁶ African Americans are at greatest risk for HIV, accounting for 42% of all people living with HIV in the U.S. and 44% of new HIV diagnoses in 2019.⁷ Expanding Medicaid is one important step toward correcting these stark racial and ethnic disparities, as 60% of individuals in the coverage gap are people of color.⁸

While Congress has taken steps to encourage Medicaid expansion, it is a solution that depends on state action and political will in states that have shown significant opposition to expansion over the past decade. There are multiple ways to close the Medicaid gap and create a federal backstop for the millions of low-income individuals who are shut out of coverage.⁹ Congress and should prioritize solutions that can be implemented quickly, do not require state action, and brings permanent relief to individuals left behind.

Simply put, individuals in the Medicaid coverage gap cannot afford to wait for states to opt into the ACA’s Medicaid expansion. The quality of life and very survival of those in the Medicaid gap is are at risk now. **Congress should act swiftly to close the gap and help make the promise of the federal Ending the HIV Epidemic initiative a reality.**

Sincerely,

² About Ending the HIV Epidemic, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, available at <https://www.cdc.gov/endhiv/about.html>.

³ Lindsey Dawson, Jennifer Kates, Kaiser Family Foundation, Insurance Coverage and Viral Suppression Among People with HIV, available at <https://www.kff.org/hiv/aids/issue-brief/insurance-coverage-and-viral-suppression-among-people-with-hiv-2018/>.

⁴ A. Hollingsworth, S. Raman, D. Sacks, and K.Wen, “Panel Paper: Does Providing Insurance Coverage Reduce the Spread of Infectious Disease? The Impact of Medicaid Expansions on HIV Diagnoses,” Association for public Policy Analysis and Management 41st Annual Fall Research Conference, November 9, 2019, available at <https://appam.confex.com/appam/2019/webprogram/Paper31657.html>.

⁵ Deeper Look: HIV in the South, available at: <https://aidsvu.org/resources/deeper-look-south/>

⁶ New HIV Diagnoses in the US and Dependent Areas by Race/Ethnicity, 2019, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/statistics.html>

⁷ HIV Basics: Overview: Data & Trends: U.S. Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, available at: <https://www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics/overview/data-and-trends/statistics>.

⁸ Gideon Lukens, Breanna Sharer, Closing Medicaid Coverage Gap Would Help Diverse Group and Narrow Racial Disparities (June 2021), available at <https://www.cbpp.org/research/health/closing-medicaid-coverage-gap-would-help-diverse-group-and-narrow-racial>

⁹ Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation, Filling the Medicaid Coverage Gap: A Federal Policy Priority for People Living with HIV (June 2021), available at <https://www.chlpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Filling-the-Medicaid-Coverage-Gap.pdf>.

Advocates for Youth
AIDS Action Baltimore
AIDS Alabama
AIDS Alliance for Women, Infants, Children, Youth & Families
AIDS United
American Academy of HIV Medicine
Amida Care
APLA Health
CAEAR Coalition
Cascade AIDS Project
Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation
Community Education Group
Georgia AIDS Coalition
HealthHIV
Hispanic Health Network
HIV Medicine Association
HIV+Hepatitis Policy Institute
Human Rights Campaign
International Association of Providers of AIDS Care
John Snow, Inc. (JSI)
Latino Commission on AIDS
Latinos Salud
NASTAD
National Black Gay Men's Advocacy Coalition
National Black Women's HIV/AIDS Network
National Coalition of STD Directors
National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association
National Working Positive Coalition
NMAC
North Carolina AIDS Action Network
Positive Impact Health Centers
Positive Women's Network-USA
Prevention Access Campaign
San Francisco AIDS Foundation
The AIDS Institute
The Well Project